

Maryland Sod Conference Attracts 126 Producers

The 8th Annual Maryland Sod Conference was attended by 126 interested sod producers, installers and allied industrial people on March 8. The meetings were well attended with participants coming from Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Virginia. This year the program veered away from cultural practices and hit hard on other "dollar important" topics such as collection of accounts, turfgrass financing and sod contracts.

Carl I. Morris, Sr., Associated Claims, Inc., Silver Springs, Md. led off the conference and hit home with his discussion entitled "Collection of Accounts in the Sod Industry." Time did not permit all questions to be answered. The interesting fact that "... 70% of all people pay their bills,

20% are inclined to be a bit slow in paying, 5% are migrants, 3% are indigents and 2% are true credit criminals raised some eyebrows." Further he stated that one dollars worth of credit today is only worth 90 cents in 90 days, 50 cents in 6 months and 30 cents in one year.

Morris warned the participants to grant credit with the idea that every single account could become a collection problem. He suggested these steps to follow: 1) Grant credit in a thorough and intelligent manner. 2) Establish and follow a written billing and collection time schedule procedure. 3) Recognize when your efforts will be more productive applied to other phases of your business. 4) Select and work with a professional collection agency to hold your credit

losses to a bare minimum.

Neil Shpritz then presented an interesting talk about economic activities for which Maryland has outstanding advantages. He pointed out Maryland's prospects for growth in the coming years. Sod industry growth is dependent upon expansion in population and housing construction, and Maryland's rate of growth in these areas has been substantial. The rate of population growth in Maryland is about twice the national average and second highest east of the Mississippi, exceeded only by Florida.

Shpritz indicated forces shaping the Maryland economy include the economic impact of the Chesapeake Bay, the geographic variety of the coastal plain — Piedmont Plateau region, highly developed transportation arteries, close proximity to the Nation's capitol, good agricultural climate, soil and tradition and excellent harbor facilities.

Roie M. Godsey, Senior Vice President, Virginia National Bank, Charlottesville, Va., talked about financing a turfgrass operation and pointed out that the turfgrass business is not too different in principle from any other business to be capi-
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talized. There is the need to generate cash flow to repay long-term, intermediate and short-term obligations. It is necessary that the sod producer sell himself and his plan of success to the bank. Godsey challenged the sod industry of Maryland and Virginia to get busy collecting data on the importance of the industry to the economy of the state and to point out the profitability and stability of sod production and installation. He indicated that once economic impact, profitability and stability are documented, money will be more available to the industry.

Charles H. Darrach, Cornell University, presented results of his Master's thesis research on how management factors and the environment can influence sod heating. Harvesting sod early in the morning seems to be extremely important in increasing sod survival.

Reducing the amount of living tissue between layers of sod by reducing mowing height from 2 or 3 inches to 1 inch before harvesting did reduce sod heating but decreased esthetic value of the sod.

Collecting clippings reduced sod heating 2.5 degrees centigrade after 48 hours under the conditions of his experiment. Cutting depth was noted to influence sod heating with a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch cutting depth producing the lowest storage temperature and best overall survival.

The method of stacking sod was shown to influence its rate of heating with rolled sod remaining cooler than either grass to grass folded or grass to soil folded after 96 hours on the pallet. Grass to grass folded heated faster than grass to soil folded sod.

Dennis E. Brown addressed the luncheon banquet with an explanation of the amended Virginia Sod law. The important point made was that the only people needing the license are those making the final sale in Virginia.

The afternoon session began with a three member panel on "Problems in the Sod Industry from Seed to Lawn". Walter Livingstone covered sod producer problems such as rocks, erosion, collection of accounts and pricing. Franklin Delp followed with a discussion of sod installer problems. He stressed the need for stronger specifications indicating

"who does what". Martin L. Rize relayed the problems of the big builder to the conference participants. He pointed out the need for "big time installers" who can handle 300 home installations in a relatively short period of time. There was a great deal of audience participation during the panel discussion which substantiated the need for this problem session.

Dr. Herbert Cole, Penn State University gave the audience a "fire and brimstone" speech on the importance of utilizing blends and mixtures in sod production. He pointed out that uniformity of species and variety invariably leads to disease and pest problems. His admonition that "A turfgrass monoculture . . . is sooner or later heading for disaster" fell upon a captive audience. Dr. Cole further said that the sod industry is obligated to provide buyers with blends as a form of consumer protection. (See "Compromising At The Sod Farm," WTT, April 1973.

James W. Coddington, Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA, presented the difficult subject of Sod Marketing Orders in a very easy to
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understand fashion. His discussion was extremely pertinent because of Michigan's recent sod market price collapse and their subsequent investigation into the possibility of stabilizing the market with sod marketing orders. Coddington said that a marketing order is a legal tool provided by the government for solving marketing problems. Its purpose is to improve returns to the growers through orderly marketing. Types of market orders would include quantity or quality regulations, market or production research, marketing statistics, regulations prohibiting unfair methods of competition and unfair trade practices or price posting by handlers to aid in stabilizing prices.

The last speaker for the conference was Kathryn D. Williams, Bowen & Diggs, Wheaton, Md. A lawyer in her own right, Ms. Williams discussed the basic elements of contracts for sale of sod and pointed out the weaknesses of oral contracts with their almost certain requirement for litigation. Her discussion of the Maryland code regulating sod sales with relationship to contracts was pertinent and raised many questions.

Rocky Mountain Sod Growers To Host ASPA Meeting

Plans for the annual summer meeting of the American Sod Producers Association have been finalized. This year's meeting is scheduled for Denver, Colorado and the host organization for the event is the Rocky Mountain Sod Growers Association. Dates for the meeting are July 16-19.

The three-day program will include educational sessions on the technical aspects of sod production, tours of sod operations at the Richlawn Turf farms, sod installation, equipment field day and the annual business meeting and banquet.

A special program is being planned for women and children.

American Sod Producers Hold Meeting In Hawaii

Sod producers traveled by charter flight from various areas of the United States mainland and Canada to Hawaii for the winter meeting of the American Sod Producers Association. About 200 attended the eight-day trip, including sod producers, suppliers, wives and children. The late-winter meeting provided an opportunity to enjoy the unlimited natural beauty of Hawaii as well as attend exceptionally well-rated educational sessions.

Kauai and Maui islands were selected as the sites for the ASPA activities. These islands exhibit unlimited natural beauty and quietness as contrasted to other areas of intensified development.

The educational sessions were planned as seminar sessions on the business rather than technical aspects of sod production. Dr. James Longstreet, chairman of the finance department, College of Business Administration of the University of South Florida, presented two one-half day seminars on the topic of financial management. His presentations were filled with a constant flow of valuable and useful information for the successful management of sod operations.

In addition, Dr. Longstreet conducted two roundtable discussions that proved to be most helpful in answering questions raised by sod producers attending the seminar sessions. Frequently, specific questions lead to lengthy discussions on certain aspects of financial management as to how it relates to sod production.

During a third seminar session,



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